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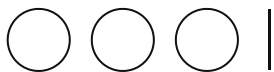
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### OPINION // COMMENTARY

# Commentary: Get health care workers protective gear now

**Alexandra Garcia, Karen Johnson and Whitney Thurman, For the Express-News**

Updated: April 9, 2020 7 p.m.



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A woman sews masks in her home in New Jersey — a sign of our country's outrageous lack of preparedness. Together, let's demand the federal response so desperately needed.

Getty Images

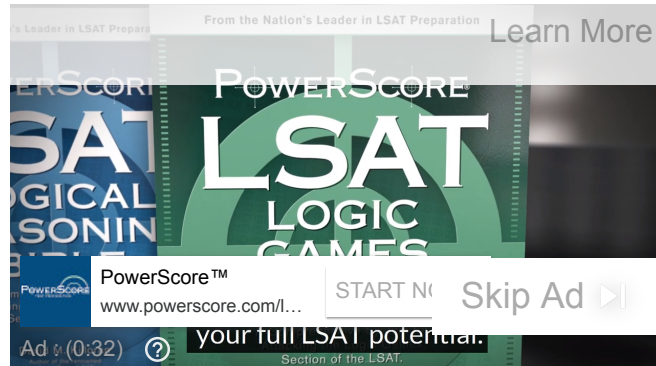
Throughout history, when America has been in crisis, ordinary people have stepped up to help each other. We waited in line for hours to donate blood after 9/11. We rescued stranded neighbors after Hurricane Harvey. And today, amid a global pandemic, Americans are staying home and firing up sewing machines to make cloth masks for front-line health care providers due to shortages of proper personal protective equipment, or PPE.

As public health nurses and researchers with expertise in pandemic preparedness and decades of experience caring for patients, communities and populations, we know this situation is untenable. Enough is enough. The federal government must immediately provide PPE that meets the same rigorous standard health care providers have always used when caring for patients with highly infectious diseases.

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Recent recommendations from the CDC for health care providers to use cloth masks, even scarves, if proper PPE is unavailable has incited an army of sewers across the country to make cloth masks. Some hospitals and providers welcome these efforts, rationalizing that “something is better than nothing” and using cloth masks would preserve PPE.


It is outrageous that our country’s lack of preparedness, including slow deployment of the national stockpile containing some expired items, has brought us to this point.

Using cloth masks places health care providers in danger and may exacerbate the transmission. A study indicates cloth masks allow nearly 97 percent through them. Using cloth masks is akin to using a net to catch flies. It won’t stop deadly transmission of microbes.



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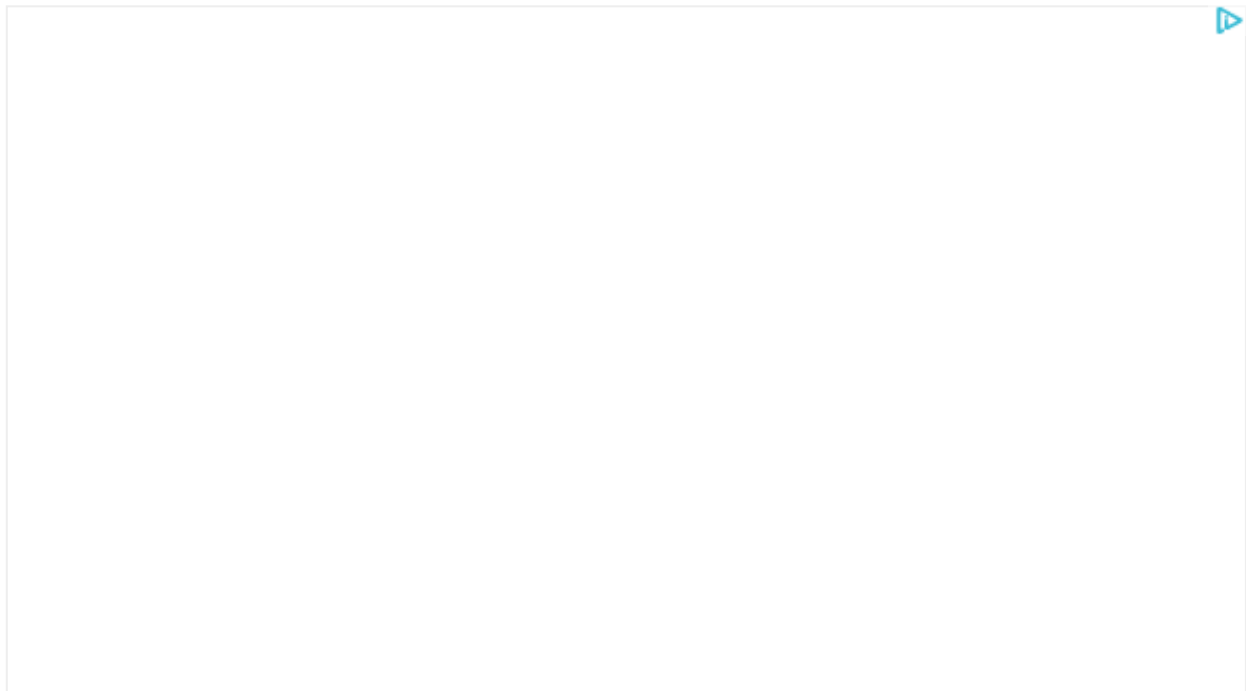
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Standards frequently loosen in response to emerging crises. However, calling on “last resort” options, like homemade masks, when we have yet to exhaust alternative supply chains for PPE is shortsighted.

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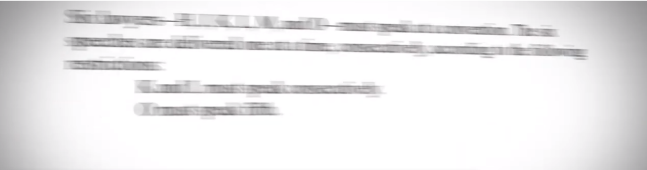
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Only the federal government, with the help of  
access to PPE that meets tight standards for p  
agents such as COVID-19. States have limited  
equipment for a robust, sustained response to  
Donald Trump recently expanded the Defense  
March, to ramp up production of needed PPE




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